

VZCZCXRO5049
OO RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #3480/01 2940302
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 210302Z OCT 07
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3926
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0200

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003480

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/19/2017

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [SMIG](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS READY FOR MORE ACTIVE ROLE
IN IRAQ

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan Crocker for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: During a wide-ranging discussion with the Ambassador, senior representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Iraq described plans for increasing in-country presence based on their assessment of improved security. The ICRC Head of Delegation to Iraq (HOD-I), Karl Mattli, added the ICRC will eventually re-open its Baghdad office with the help of the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). The Ambassador welcomed this increased presence and offered US Embassy assistance if required.

¶2. (C) The Ambassador urged the ICRC to monitor Iraqi detainee facilities and prisons, especially Camp Bucca near Umm Qasr, which houses 20,000 detainees and inmates. Describing the ICRC relationship with the GOI as very good, Mattli said they would now like to negotiate a full framework agreement for their operations. He was not as optimistic about future relations with the Iraqi Red Crescent, which he lamented as deteriorating. Mattli also expressed concerns about the Iraqi justice system especially capital punishment cases which he assessed as lacking full and impartial judicial review. The Ambassador solicited the ICRC position on potential transfers of Mujahedin e-Khalq (MEK) refugees from their camp outside Baghdad to UNHCR housing in northern Iraq. HOD-I Mattli said he was not opposed to it in principle, but needed more information before providing an official response. END SUMMARY.

Raising the ICRC Profile in Iraq

¶3. (C) On October 16, Ambassador Ryan Crocker hosted a meeting with the ICRC HOD-I Karl Mattli and ICRC Deputy Head of Delegation Markus Geisser to discuss their future plans for operations in Iraq. Mattli outlined plans to use their permanent presence in northern Iraq (Dahuk, Irbil, and Sulaimaniyah) as a base for temporary operations in central Iraq, particularly for missions which did not require personnel to remain overnight, e.g. detainee camp and prison visits. He said they would also increase operations in southern Iraq using a similar plan, but use Kuwait as their permanent base. He noted that the ICRC preferred to employ helicopters for these types of operations, but there were not enough readily available; now they intend to use small, short-field capable airplanes.

¶4. (C) Mattli said he planned to re-open ICRC offices in Baghdad once he found a suitable location. He added that Fon Min Zebari offered the ICRC a residence for office and housing facilities near the MFA ministry compound. The Ambassador called these welcome developments and offered US Embassy assistance in International Zone (IZ) badge

processing, Regional Security Office Quick Reaction Force (QRF) support (in case of emergencies), and logistical support, if required. He urged them to use their presence in the south to visit Camp Bucca near the Kuwaiti border which holds over 20,000 detainees and inmates. Mattli thanked the Ambassador for the IZ badge support, and said he would consider use of the QRF in emergencies, but demurred on the offer of logistical support saying it was necessary for the ICRC to maintain a neutral and independent image. But Mattli added the ICRC would welcome the Ambassador's assistance in obtaining landing rights for their aircraft at the U.S. military airfield near Ramadi. The Ambassador agreed to forward the request to MNF-I.

15. (C) Mattli described the relationship between the ICRC and the GOI as very good. He said it was time to go beyond the exchange of diplomatic letters in defining ICRC status in Iraq and move toward a more permanent framework. Although much of the ICRC mission and logistical coordination had been done with the MFA, Mattli said they found Prime Minister Maliki's office to be much better at following through on their commitments.

Problems with the Iraqi Red Crescent

16. (C) Mattli expressed far less optimism about the ICRC relationship with the Iraqi Red Crescent (IRC), which he described as &rapidly deteriorating.8 He expressed concern about an apparent personality conflict with the head of the IRC which left Mattli worried about his own personal safety. The main issue between the ICRC and IRC, he explained, was their differing views on funding versus control; the IRC was

BAGHDAD 00003480 002 OF 002

perfectly willing to accept funds from the ICRC, but without the requisite controls on IRC auditing and operations which the ICRC required. He said the whole dispute had become very political, which had led to requests for intervention by the IRC to both the American Red Cross and to Prime Minister Maliki. In the later case, the IRC president had asked Maliki to order the ICRC to &cease and desist8 its operations in Iraq. Mattli said nothing had come of this IRC demand but asked for the Ambassador's help in resolving this issue with the GOI, should it become a problem in the future. Ambassador Crocker thanked Mattli for his candor and offered his assistance in strengthening the relationship between the GOI and ICRC.

Concern over MNF-I Transfer of Iraqi prisoners

17. (C) Turning to the Iraqi justice system, Mattli expressed concern regarding the MNF-I transfer of Iraqi prisoners sentenced to death to GOI custody. He told the Ambassador the ICRC did not take a stand on the death penalty per se, but felt it had a duty to monitor the entire judicial process to insure defendants received a fair trial and had an opportunity to appeal the death sentence to an impartial and independent judiciary. Mattli said the ICRC did not believe these conditions currently exist in Iraq and this formed the basis of their objections to the carrying out of capital sentences in Iraq. Mattli also lamented what he called the &real risk of arbitrary detention8 by Iraqi security forces, which left thousands of people stuck in detention camps without any recourse to a fair hearing to secure their release. On the positive side, he noted improvements in the detention camps themselves, but still not enough to fully meet ICRC standards, especially regarding overcrowding.

18. (C) Concerning U.S.-controlled detention centers in Iraq and their commanders, Mattli said the ICRC had a good relationship with the MNF-I Deputy Commanding General for Detainee Operations, Major General Stone. He said his primary issue with the MNF-I was full access to all places of detention within a reasonable time after the initial ICRC

request. In this regard, he asked the Ambassador to relay a request to MNF-I to shorten the actual waiting time from the mandatory maximum of 14 days contained in the Geneva Convention to a significantly shorter period. He admitted this was not required, but requested it as a good faith gesture.

Relocation of MEK Refugees

19. (C) The Ambassador solicited the ICRC position about a possible voluntary transfer of some MEK refugees from their camp outside Baghdad to a UNHCR facility in northern Iraq. Mattli said his first reaction was to be proactive about the transfer because he fully understood the issues with the MEK camp. He added that he did not expect the ICRC Headquarters in Geneva to have a problem with the transfer either but deferred giving the Ambassador an official position until he had more information. The Ambassador agreed to provide Mattli with additional details upon request to facilitate an ICRC position.

CROCKER